

A RECORD OF COMMUNAL EGG-LAYING IN THE SKINK *CARLIA TETRADACTYLA*. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 33: 60. 1993:- During a visit to the Oakey area, southeast Queensland on 25 November 1992, a communal nest of 25 skink eggs was located. The site — a disused railway line — was approximately 8 km NW of Oakey township and consisted of a relatively continuous row of wooden sleepers.

The nest was located beneath a single sleeper, which was lying on an approximate north-south axis, at its northern end. The whole sleeper was also angled slightly to the west. The eggs varied little in size. All were partially buried in the soil. The eggs were not measured at the time, but their size suggested they could belong to *Carlia tetradactyla*, a very common species at the site. Considering the paucity of records of communal nesting for *Carlia*, one egg was retained by one of us (RP) for artificial incubation to confirm its identification.

On return to Brisbane the egg was transferred to a small plastic container with a little soil from beneath the sleeper and sprayed lightly with water. Access to an incubator was not possible immediately, so the container was maintained between 25–30°C near a 60 watt incandescent light bulb. After two days, the egg had shrivelled markedly and the upper surface had turned a tea-brown colour. However, after a liberal spraying, it almost regained its original shape, though some small wrinkles remained until hatching. After five days the egg was placed in an incubator maintained at 29.5–30.5°C.

On the 3 December 1992, the container was removed from the incubator for the purpose of taking measurements of the egg. However, on opening, it was found the egg had already hatched. Even so, approximate measurements were taken of the empty egg-shell (15.8 × 10 mm). The hatchling was tentatively identified as *C. tetradactyla* and a snout-vent measurement was taken (27.6 mm). It was then transferred to a small holding container where it thrived and began feeding on hatchling locusts within 4–5 days. The specimen was later taken to the Queensland Museum, where its identification was confirmed (P. Couper). It was subsequently lodged as Queensland Museum specimen number J56882.

Considering the consistent clutch size of two eggs for *C. tetradactyla* (Greer, 1989), the large number of eggs found by

us indicates the use of the nesting site by some 13 individual females (or a smaller number of animals laying multiple clutches). Greer states that the communal nests of two genera, *Lampropholis* and *Saproscincus*, usually contain eggs laid almost simultaneously, or at least within a few of hours. He also notes that (at least with the above two genera) nests always consist of eggs from only one species. Thus it seems fair to assume that all 25 eggs belong to *C. tetradactyla*, especially as there were no other abundant, similarly-sized species observed in the vicinity.

Greer (1989) cites only one reference (Wilhoft, 1963) for communal nesting in the genus *Carlia*, *C. rhomboidalis* (= *C. rubrigularis* Ingram & Covacevich, 1989). Thus our record is the second instance of such behaviour in *Carlia*.

It is not known what stimulates several female lizards to lay in the same site. At the nest discovered by us, there did not appear to be any old shells to indicate past use as a favoured nesting site. It is also interesting to speculate why this particular sleeper was chosen amongst hundreds of others. Perhaps it had special features attractive to gravid females, or it may simply have been a choice by one female that, in turn, stimulated several others to lay, possibly by some olfactory cue.

Literature Cited

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 Wilhoft, D.C. 1963. Reproduction in the tropical Australian skink *Leiolopisma rhomboidalis*. *American Midland Naturalist* 70(2): 442–461.

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